



On Early Childhood Mental Health

Building Resilience in Young Children

When Jeremiah falls down, he gets up right away and goes back to what he was doing and tries again. When Jasmine falls, she sits and cries, and refuses to try again. What makes the difference? Why are some children able to thrive in spite of serious traumas in their lives—such as neglect, abuse, poverty, serious illness? The ability to bounce back after a crisis (as small as a fall or as significant as neglect or the death of a loved one) or thrive in spite of persistent obstacles is called “resilience.” Resilience protects children from the most severe effects of stress and trauma and helps them cope more effectively.

Characteristics of Resilient Children

They have: trusting and loving relationships, structure at home, people who are good role models, encouragement to be independent, access to healthcare and education, people who praise them

They are: loveable, loving, proud of their achievements, not easily discouraged, responsible, hopeful, trustful

They can: communicate their thoughts and feelings, solve problems, manage their feelings, understand themselves, find people they can trust, laugh at themselves



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How to build resilience

- Make sure children know they are loved, valued and appreciated for who they are
- Look for the child's strengths and emphasize the positive
- Teach self-care and good habits, such as healthy eating, exercise, getting enough rest
- Help children experience success and understand that mistakes are okay
- Encourage social skills, such as making and playing with friends and participating in group activities
- Maintain a daily routine such as bedtime hugs and stories
- Support a child's ability to learn and use his or her imagination
- Understand the stressors families face and offer supportive resources during adversity
- Be part of developing community resources that support children and families
- Teach problem-solving skills
- Set clear and consistent boundaries

Resources

Building Resilience: The Power to Cope with Adversity by William Beardslee et al., Zero to Three. www.zerotothree.org/resources/357-building-resilience

Resilience: What It Is and How Children and Young People Can be Helped to Develop It, by Kirtsie Maclean www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cyc01-0803-resilience.html

